

Common Sense & Faith

ARE THEY ENEMIES OR PARTNERS?

by Rev. Sylvester Herbert

Quite often we witness a tug of war between faith and common sense. Finding the proper balance between the two sometimes eludes even the best of us. In some quarters there are calls being made for Christians to “stand on the Word”, “use the Word”, or “trust God alone”. For such persons advocating the use of common sense is sometimes seen as a violation of the biblical exhortation to “walk by faith and not by sight” (II Cor. 5:7).


Common sense is “sound judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts.” There is much biblical support for incorporating common sense into our daily living and decision-making:

1. **Moses’ parents exercised faith in God. But theirs was not just naked faith. It was blended with a healthy dose of common sense. They knew the area of the river where Pharaoh’s daughter would**

bathe; they knew the day on which she bathed and apparently even the time of day! Their plan to push the basket out in the Nile undoubtedly took these factors into consideration. It made good sense as well to have the older sister well-positioned to recommend a nurse for the baby just in case she was asked (Exod. 2:1-10).

2. **God revealed Himself as Jehovah-Rapha which translates, “the Lord who heals”(Exod. 15:26). However, the children of Israel were not to disregard health laws on the grounds that their faith was in Jehovah-Rapha.**

It was common sense for them to wash (sanitize) themselves and



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isolate or quarantine in order to avoid the spread of infectious diseases (Num. 5:2–4 and Lev. 11:33, 15:12; 13:1–14:57).

3. What we refer to as common sense is often translated as *prudence* or *discretion* by many Bible translators. For example, Proverbs 22:3 states that “A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself.” The point being made here is clear: “If you are on a collision course with disaster it is common sense to put measures in place to avoid or mitigate the impending danger.
4. Jesus taught the importance of counting the cost and used analogies involving common sense to cement His point. Typically, the person erecting a building and a king engaging in warfare will use practical knowledge and judgment in the planning stages to help secure the desired outcome (Lk. 14:28-32).

Of course, we should never assume that it is only common sense we need when critical decisions have to be made. John

Wesley advocated the use of Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience (known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral) in coming to theological conclusions or in discerning the mind of God. Scripture is the primary source from which all other sources flow and should never be bypassed because of “what makes sense to me.”

As we look forward to the future, we must pray more and trust God more. We must also plan and exercise sound common sense in the process. In his classic work, *My Utmost For His*

Highest, Oswald Chambers provides some much-needed advice in this regard: “Faith in active opposition to common sense is mistaken enthusiasm and narrow-mindedness, and common sense in opposition to faith demonstrates a mistaken reliance on reason as the basis for truth. The life of faith brings the two of these into the proper relationship.” Thus boldness of faith is married to common sense. What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!

